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## ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to use directed writing strategies to teach writing skills to middle grades language arts students who frequently failed to make average or above scores in essay writing assignments. The program included three specific strategies. The first strategy was to teach higher-order thinking and metacognitive strategies related to the writing process by modeling writing techniques and directed writing activities. The second strategy was to use cooperative learning in small groups while working on writing assignments. The third strategy was to teach word processing and writing skills by using computers. The goal and expectations were for students to improve their writing skills so that they would attain higher grades. An analysis of the data revealed that students did improve their writing skills, but not significantly. Students also improved their knowledge of word processing by using the computer. (Contains 75 references and a table of data. Appendixes contain the informal survey instrument, essay pretest and posttest, essay pretest and posttest results, and the grammar pretest and posttest.) (Author/RS)

# Using Directed Writing Strategies to Teach Students Writing Skills in Middle Grades Language Arts

by  
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Cluster 87

A Practicum II Report Presented to  
the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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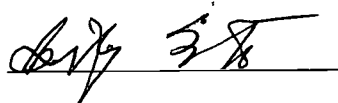
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## APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.



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This practicum report was submitted by Marguerite C. DeFoe under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

8-11-00

Date of Final Approval of Report

Paul Borthwick

Paul Borthwick, Ed.D., Adviser

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## Abstract

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This practicum was designed to use directed writing strategies to teach writing skills to middle grades language arts students who frequently failed to make average or above scores in essay writing assignments.

The program included three specific strategies. The first strategy was to teach higher order thinking and metacognitive strategies related to the writing process by modeling writing techniques and directed writing activities. The second strategy was to use cooperative learning in small groups while working on writing assignments. The third strategy was to teach word processing and writing skills by using computers. The goal and expectations were for all students to improve their writing skills so that students would attain higher grades.

An analysis of the data revealed that students did improve their writing skills, but not significantly. Students also improved their knowledge of word processing by using the computer.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Description of Community

The practicum took place in a county in the lower southeastern United States.

The terrain is generally flat, swampy, and slightly hilly. According to the 1990 Census, about 62% of the county's land area is forested and the remaining 38% was either farmed or urbanized. This county, which is located in the central portion, encompasses 618 square miles. The community has a population of 33,000.

The county's economy is based predominantly on farming and forestation.

The reaping of pulpwood to provide the constant need for paper mills in this community constitutes a large portion of the local economy. The county's economy has expanded its growth by 10% over the last 5 years with 16% of growth in industry and new businesses. The estimated unemployment rate for this county is 6%.

Five companies provide very high employment. They are major chain distribution and stores, with 1400 employees, agri-business, with 1300 employees, Board of Education, with 930 employees, a manufacturer of house trailers, with 895, and manufacturer of turbine components, with 800 employees.

New industries have come to this county. One manufacturing company, which makes lawn mower motors, small engines, and carburetors, has a work force of 500 employees. Two cotton gins employ 200 people. Three newly constructed tobacco warehouses, used for storage and auction of tobacco, employ 100 people. Recent construction of several service buildings includes the post office, with 41 employees, the hospital, with 550 employees, a civic auditorium, with 81 employees, and the airport



hangar, with two employees. New construction of retail businesses includes a furniture store, an import car sales dealership, and a super discount store. There are four new banks, three new hotels, and four new restaurants. There are two new sports entertainment parks, one for indoor sports and one for outside sports.

There are 11 public schools in the county, one high school, two middle schools, and eight elementary schools. The school system has an enrollment of 8,000 students, from prekindergarten through 12th-grade. There are three private schools with a total enrollment of 700 students. The community has a junior college with an enrollment of 1044 and a vocational school with an enrollment of 300 students. Of the population it is estimated that 70% had education ranging from high school to graduate degrees.

### Writer's Work Setting

The work setting is a middle school. The mission of this school is to provide a climate that will create a community of lifelong learners who are effective and happy citizens, and who are productive in a global society. The goals of this school system are to create a conducive school climate, upgrade academic achievement and school discipline, expand school and community participation, and organize school and business partnerships.

Formerly an all-Black K-12 school, this school was built in the early twenties. When schools integrated in 1969, it became a junior high school. In 1990 the junior high school became a middle school, teaching students between the ages of 12 and 15, an age at which they are experiencing many physical, social, emotional, and mental changes.

The middle school concept allows the teacher to recognize these changes and provide a progressive curriculum and conducive learning environment for students to transition from the elementary school to high school. Students are offered basic academic subjects such as language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science and exploratory subjects such as agriculture, art, band, career connections, chorus, computer technology, foreign languages, health, home economics, keyboarding, and physical education. There are six academic teams of four teachers who teach these subjects in a 70-minute block of time for the entire school year. Students are assigned to a team of teachers for a year. Teachers become quite familiar with their students' capabilities and implement teaching strategies to successfully achieve the needs of the students.

Students are required to enroll in two exploratory subjects every 6 weeks. Each year students must be taught 60 hours of physical education and 30 hours of health, both required by law for all middle school students. The exploratory subjects introduce students to a new knowledge of subjects in which they might want to enroll later in high school for elective classes.

Having a center for natural sciences makes this middle school unique. The teachers composed a grant and received financial support for the establishment of the center. This center of natural sciences is used by the faculty to teach academics to the students by using hands-on experiences. Teachers use this center to teach objectives on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), which are mandated by the state. The center consists of the geo-range with a volcano, amphi-theater, recycling center, aqua habitat, sea floorscape, human sundial, archeological dig pit, the forest, butterfly

garden, and the 2020 solar-powered village.

At the work setting there are 52 faculty members and 3 administrators. The faculty levels of education are as follows: bachelor's degree, 28; master's degree, 13; specialist's degree, 11. The faculty strives to obtain new strategies for the teaching process.

The entire teaching staff continues to develop skills in its academic area of concentration. The faculty takes courses offered by the school system or colleges. Faculty members go to workshops, seminars, and other exemplary middle schools to observe programs, with a view to obtaining new techniques in teaching which could benefit the students. The staff teaches a total of 630 sixth through eighth-grade students.

The writer's work setting is a middle school with an enrollment of 630 students. The students' ages range from 10 to 15. The population is made up 61.9% Caucasian, 30% Black, 7.7% Hispanic, and 0.4% Asian American. There are six interdisciplinary teams each having approximately 100 students for instruction in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Most students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds at this middle school while very few came from rich cultural backgrounds.

### Writer's Role

The entire practicum was conducted by the writer, a teacher with 18 years of experience. The writer has a specialist degree in middle school education and is pursuing a doctorate. Her role and responsibilities were to conduct the practicum, with permission of their parents, in 2 of the 4 language arts classes, totaling 45 students. The strategies that were implemented had been suggested by research on improving students' writing skills. The ITBS and QCC's objectives were met during the implementation of these strategies.

## Chapter II: Study of the Problem

### Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that sixth grade language arts students had difficulty writing essays successfully. Most students should have been performing at grade level in their writing skills. However, entering sixth-grade students in this middle school had scored below the state average for the past 3 years on the state's curriculum-based assessment for writing.

### Problem Description

The problem as it existed in these sixth-grade language arts classes was that the students experienced difficulty in writing skills and demonstrated below-level writing skills when they completed essay assignments. The writer administered an informal survey (Appendix A) to 5 middle school language arts teachers. The survey asked the teachers their opinions about middle school students' writing abilities. All indicated their students could not write essays satisfactorily. Teachers stated on the survey that failing scores on students' essay assignments were indicated in grade books. From an investigation of students' assignments that were submitted to teachers for grading, the students failed in writing skills such as writing sentences, paragraph development, and usage of correct grammar. Further investigation found that students failed to turn in written assignments or turned in partially-completed written assignments.

An investigation of the entering sixth-grade students' scores on the curriculum-based writing assessment from the three feeder schools for the last 3 years indicated that students' developmental stage of writing fell below the state average in the stages of

engaging and extending. There were six developmental stages of writing according to the assessment. The stages were ranked from a low of Stage 1 to a high of Stage 6, indicating the developmental stage of writing. These stages were emerging, developing, focusing, experimenting, engaging, and extending. The sixth-grade students were at the average of Stage 4, the experimenting writing level.

### Problem Documentation

It was indicated in the anecdotal records that students demonstrated a high level of frustration when writing essays in class assignments. Data from teachers' grade books indicated that students received grades below 70% on essay writing. Based on assessments from previous years, data indicated that students' developmental stage of writing fell below the state average in engaging and extending.

### Causative Analysis

The first cause of this problem was limited essay writing experiences in language arts classes. Students had not acquired the necessary skills for writing essays. Data from teachers' grade books indicated students' failing grades on essay assignments. Results of an investigation of the three feeder schools indicated that ineffective teaching methods created students' poor writing skills. An informal survey was conducted which indicated that students had very little if any writing experiences in fifth-grade assignments.

The second cause of this problem was that teachers administered short-answer tests that did not require students to demonstrate writing skills. Evidence from an informal survey administered to teachers revealed that they were overwhelmed with required paper work from the district and the administrators' offices. The teachers found that short-

answer tests required less time to grade and allowed students to receive immediate feedback on course assignments. Teachers were able to teach the ITBS and QCC objectives much more quickly knowing they did not have to grade long essay tests on the academic material being taught.

The third cause of this problem was that students came from an environment where communication skills were very poor, and the language used was not proper. Students came from low socio-economic backgrounds at this middle school while very few came from rich cultural backgrounds. Based on an interview with an instructional coordinator from one of the elementary feeder schools, it was revealed there is a tremendous correlation between socio-economic level and academic achievement. The instructional coordinator felt students who came from low socio-economic backgrounds were at a disadvantage in terms of academic achievement. Further investigation revealed that 75% of the students attending this middle school were on free or reduced lunch status. Also, the writer concluded from the same informal survey (Appendix A) that teachers stated students' communication skills were very poor.

The fourth cause of students' poor writing abilities was that teachers had limited time to teach all of the required state and district objectives. For the last 3 years, the language arts curriculum included spelling, grammar, writing, and reading. Reading was added to the language arts class. Reading was taught as an individual class. As a result of a faculty meeting after teachers had voiced their inabilities to teach reading, administrators made the decision to include reading in all language arts classes. Reading would no longer be taught as a separate academic class. Based on the informal survey (Appendix A) it was

revealed that it was almost impossible for the teachers to accomplish teaching to all the ITBS and QCC objectives. Teachers also revealed that writing objectives were required in language arts. Teachers elected to teach the reading, spelling, and grammar objectives first because of poor reading scores for the last 3 years at this middle school. If time permitted, the writing objectives were taught in a hurried fashion which left little time for students to have ample writing experiences.

### Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The writer researched the following topics for the literature review: improving middle school writing skills, writing skills, improving elementary writing skills, directed writing activities, improving high school writing, modeling writing activities, journal writing, portfolio collections, word processing skills using computers, dialects, student achievements, performance based assessment, English language composition, writing strategies, and short-answer tests.

A number of researchers found that middle school students had difficulty writing essays as students had writing difficulty in the present writer's setting. Goodson and McCart's (1986) report described seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade students as needing remediation in descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive composition writing. Goodson and McCart report found that many students in low-level achievement groups were very challenged to the writing process. They found through observation of classroom procedure, that the strategies used for teaching writing to the students were very limited, and the teachers' grading of papers had a negative effect on the students' writing ability. Therefore, teachers began implementing strategies to improve the students' writing

abilities. Evidence of the problem from the present writer's setting was also taken through observations of classroom procedures and of the students' behavior towards writing assignments.

It was indicated in the literature that in Moore and Turner's (1988) study, fourth- and fifth-grade students were reluctant to revise and edit their compositions. Moore and Turner's pre-study assessment indicated that students felt their first draft was satisfactory the first time. An investigation of the students' revised writing revealed that teachers found the writing more legible than the first draft, but it had not been polished for the final draft. Moore and Turner began deliberating what strategies could be utilized to improve the students' writing abilities. In the present writer's setting, students did not want to revise their writing because they did not understand the process of how to edit their work. Students in Moore and Turner's study had the same attitude.

A 12-week practicum was conducted in an alternative school by Black (1989) to improve fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students' abilities in composing simple sentences, using language mechanics properly, and composing proper compositions. Students were placed in this program according to their learning and behavior problems which were documented by their homeroom teachers. Black's goal was to provide strategies to improve students' writing skills. The students in Black's study were having difficulty in writing and grammar, as in the present writer's setting.

Snow (1990) conducted a 12-week practicum with at-risk fourth graders who had difficulty communicating their thoughts, concepts, and ideas into essay form. English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) bilingual and special education students were chosen for this



practicum. Snow (1990) wanted to motivate the students to improve their writing skills. In the present writer's setting, ESL/bilingual and special education students were mainstreamed into the language arts class. These students had difficulty in writing their thoughts into essay form as in Snow's practicum.

Another publication that reflected students needing to improve writing skills as in the present writer's setting was Norris's (1990) 10-week program. Norris conducted the program to improve fifth- and sixth-grade students' written communication at an elementary and junior high school. According to a survey, most teachers felt their students needed to improve their writing skills. Teachers felt that students should be able to write independently. Therefore, Norris began implementing strategies to improve students' writing abilities.

A 1-year study was conducted by Ross, Smith, and Woodson (1990) on 55 sixth-grade minority students who needed improvement on writing skills. Ross et al. found that students' experiences with and attitudes towards writing were negative. Ross began implementing strategies to improve students' writing skills and attitudes toward writing. The present writer's problem was also on sixth-grade students with poor writing abilities and negative attitudes towards writing.

Gomez (1996) conducted a 12-week study to improve writing skills of 7 fifth-grade bilingual students who were having difficulty writing essays. The students' abilities in writing essays were evidenced by teachers' observations and evaluations of students writing in the classroom, and test scores. He also found that students' leisure time was not spent on literacy activities, and students had underdeveloped oral language skills. Further

investigation indicated that lack of family interaction and literacy modeling caused poor writing skills. Gomez's (1996) objective was to improve the students' writing abilities. As in the present writer's setting, the problem was that students had difficulty writing essays.

Additionally, Boersma, Dye, Hartmann, Herbert, and Walsh (1997) described a program in Illinois with students in Grades 1, 3, 4, and 5 with a need for writing improvement. The students' difficulty in writing essays was evidenced by teachers' observations and evaluations of students' writing in the classroom, from students' surveys stating that they had difficulty in writing essays, and from students' samples of writing. The objective of Boersma et al. was to improve the students' writing abilities. The present writer's problem of students' poor writing ability was also evidenced by teachers' observations and evaluations of students' writing in the classroom.

In addition, Rominski and Vazquez (1997) conducted a 15-week program to improve writing composition skills of ESL students in eighth-grade literature and composition classes. Teachers observed ESL students who lacked the skills to achieve at grade level in regular language arts classes. Rominski and Vazquez began planning teaching strategies to improve students' writing skills. As in the present writer's setting, ESL students were having difficulty writing at the sixth-grade level in the language arts class.

Additionally, Cox, Holden, and Pickett's (1998) 18-week plan was to improve writing skills of a regular education first-grade class, an intermediate behavior disorder class, and a seventh- and eighth-grade self-contained educable mentally handicapped (EMH) class, all of whom exhibited unsatisfactory writing skills. The evidence of the

existence of the problem was school records, teacher observations of students, lack of a writing environment in the classroom, and students' negative attitudes toward writing. Cox et al. began developing an effective strategy to improve students' writing skills. In the present writer's setting, EMH and behavior disordered students were having difficulty writing essays in the language arts class.

Another research project was developed by Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarbiewski, and Sebastian's (1998) to improve writing skills of second through fifth-grade students in two districts in a growing middle to upper class communities. The need for improving writing skills was evidenced by teacher observations, anecdotal records, authentic writing portfolios, and surveys. Carter et al. began to create specific techniques for improving students' writing abilities. The present writer's problem in the setting was also evidenced by teacher observations, anecdotal records, and authentic writing of the students.

A 12-week program was implemented by Mills and Stevens (1998) for improving writing skills to increase academic achievement of sixth- and seventh-grade students from a growing middle-class middle school. This problem was evidenced by data documented from parents' surveys and teachers' observations. Mills and Stevens began to design a method for improving students' writing skills. In the present writer's setting, the problem was also evidenced by teachers' observations and data collected from students' samples of writing.

Harrington, Holik, and Hurt (1998) conducted a project for increasing writing skills of fifth graders. This problem was documented by teachers' surveys, students' writing samples, and students' surveys. Harrington et al. began generating approaches to

improve students' writing power. Similarly, the present writer used documentation of teachers' surveys and students' writing samples as evidence of the students with poor writing skills in the setting.

A number of researchers found that middle school students had low writing scores as in the writer's setting. In Goodson and McCart's (1986) report, it is evident that students who needed remedial writing skills were identified by the scores of the writing phase of the proficiency test. They found that other students who needed remediation were identified by their grades on composition writing in the teachers' grade books. Similarly, in the present writer's setting, scores from the curriculum-based writing assessment was used as documentation of students' writing problems.

Another 12-week study was conducted by Black (1989) to improve writing skills of students who were functioning more than 1 or 2 years below grade level in writing skills. Gomez's (1996) study to improve writing skills of 7 fifth-grade bilingual students who had low writing scores resulted from teachers' documented grades on students' writing samples, teachers' observations, and test scores from the Illinois Goal Assessment Program. As in the present writer's setting, students' writing scores were documented by the teacher for evidence of the problem.

Boersma et al. (1997) described a program in Illinois for students in need of writing improvement as evidenced by teachers' observations, evaluations, student surveys, and students' writing samples. Additionally, the Cox et al. (1997) plan to improve students' low writing scores was resulted from published test scores. Still another program, conducted by Mills and Stevens (1998) to improve low writing scores, was

resulted from by assessments which indicated low academic performance. Harrington et al. (1998) conducted their project to improve student's low writing scores, documented by local assessments. Similarly, the students' scores from writing samples and teachers' grade books were sources of evidence for the present writer's problem.

Several causes for middle school students' poor writing skills as they occurred in the setting were found in the literature review. In the present writer's setting, the first cause of students' poor writing skills was limited essay writing experiences in language arts classes. Students did not acquire the necessary skills for writing essays. Randolph and Robertson (1995) discussed the concept that teachers should not neglect the basic writing skills in the early childhood classroom because the students will not acquire the skills for writing essays. Large, Maholovich, Hopkins, Rhein, and Zwolinski's (1997) program revealed that a lack of teacher training caused elementary students' poor writing skills, which in turn caused students to have limited experience in writing.

Additionally, Cox et al.'s (1998) plan indicated that the lack of a writing environment in the classroom resulted in limited writing experiences for a first-grade regular education class, a fifth-grade behavior disorder class, and a seventh-eighth grade self-contained (EMH) class. Cumberworth and Hunt's (1998) report described a plan developed to improve writing skills, data from which revealed that a lack of cognitive awareness of the purpose for the writing process caused students to have limited writing experiences.

That a lack of teacher training in writing strategies brought about students' poor writing abilities was indicated in further studies. Carter et al.'s (1998) project developed

for improving writing skills indicated that the lack of teacher training resulted in students not being able to acquire the skills for the writing process. Harrington et al.'s (1998) project revealed that teachers reported that one cause of poor essay writing was students' inadequate writing skills.

In the present writer's setting, the second cause of poor writing skills was that teachers administered short-answer tests that did not require students to have writing skills. The literature review described the same cause for students' poor writing skills. Marso and Pigge's (1989) study indicated that teacher-made tests made it easy for the teacher to assess students. The teacher-made tests did not test the students' writing abilities. Shaughnessy and Eastham's (1996) paper stated that the number of multiple-choice tests and short-answer tests was one cause of students' poor writing skills. Short-answer tests were indicated as one of the causes for students' poor writing skills (Mills & Stevens, 1998).

The third cause of poor writing skills in the present writer's setting was that students came from environments where communication skills were very poor, and the language spoken was not proper. Gomez (1990) revealed that teachers needed to be trained to teach students from diverse cultures who have had no exposure to good pieces of writing due to the lack of books and proper English spoken in the home. Gomez (1996) stated that probable causes for students' poor writing skills were that "students' oral language was underdeveloped, at-risk or low income background students had fewer outside experiences, and a lack of family interaction and literacy modeling at home" (pp. 16-17). Price and Holman (1996) identified language minority students as having poor

writing skills because of their cultural backgrounds, which were not strong in the English language. Vande Kopple (1998) stated that teachers needed training to work with students who have different dialects. Teachers have to understand the nature of dialects before they can teach students how to write compositions.

In the writer's setting, the fourth cause for students having poor writing skills resulted from a new language arts curriculum, including reading, spelling, grammar, and writing, which limited time for teachers to teach all of the required state and district objectives. The same cause was described in the literature. Hermann (1989) stated that when a new language arts program had been implemented in a school, the teachers had less time to teach writing skills to the students because more time was occupied with filling out forms from the administrator's office.

### Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

#### Goal and Expectations

The goal of this practicum was that sixth grade language arts students would achieve the skill to write proper essays. The expectation was that students would use this skill to improve communication in all aspects of their lives.

#### Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. At least 32 of the 45 students will improve essay writing by obtaining at least 70% accuracy on essay assignments. The instruments of evaluation were an essay pre- and posttest (Appendix B) administered at the beginning and the end of the practicum, the scores from which the teacher (the writer) recorded in the grade book. The standard of performance was that 32 of the 45 students would obtain 70% or above on essay assignments.

2. At least 32 of the 45 students will improve sentence structure by obtaining at least 70% accuracy on assignments forming proper sentences. The instruments of evaluation were Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft sentence assessments, the scores from which the teacher recorded in her grade book. The teacher set the standard of performance at 70% for all assignments given to the students on sentence structure.

3. At least 32 of the 45 students will improve developing paragraphs by obtaining at least 70% accuracy on paragraph development assignments. The instrument of evaluation was paragraph writing assignments from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft, the scores from which were recorded in the grade book. The teacher set the standard of



performance at 70% for all assignments given to the students on paragraph development.

4. At least 32 of the 45 students will improve their grammar by obtaining at least 70% accuracy on grammar assignments. The instrument of evaluation was a pre- and posttest at the beginning and the end of the practicum, the scores from which were stored in the teacher's grade book. The standard of performance was that 32 of the 45 students would obtain 70% or above on all grammar assignments.

#### Measurement of Outcomes

Outcome 1 stated that 32 of the 45 students will improve essay writing by obtaining at least 70% accuracy on essay assignments after the 8-month practicum. The writer used the scores recorded from the essay pre- and posttest in the grade book to determine whether students obtained 70% accuracy on assignments. The information was gleaned from a daily record of students' scores kept by the teacher during the practicum. Outcome 1 was considered successful if 32 of 45 students improved their scores to 70% or better on the essay writing assignments.

The students' individual scores from the pre- and posttest were graded by a rubric and assigned a 1 to a 4 score which was converted to a numerical grade. The rubric scale measurement was 1 equivalent to a grade of 60, 2 equivalent to a grade of 70, 3 equivalent to a grade of 80, and 4 equivalent to a grade of 100. A comparison was made between percentage scores of the pre- and posttest which determined how many students obtained a grade of 70. The results of the scores were presented in chart form (Appendix C).

Outcome 2 stated that 32 of the 45 students will improve sentence structure by obtaining 70% accuracy on assignments forming proper sentences. The students

completed the sentence structure assignments and turned them in to be assessed. The writer averaged the scores recorded in the grade book from sentence structure assignments to determine whether the students obtained 70% accuracy on assignments at the end of the practicum. The measurement of the outcome was gleaned from a daily record of students' scores kept by the teacher during the practicum. Outcome 2 was considered successful if 32 of 45 students improved sentence structure with 70%.

Outcome 3 stated that 32 of the 45 students will improve paragraph development by obtaining 70% accuracy on paragraph development assignments. The students completed the assignments and handed them in for the teacher's assessment. The writer averaged the scores recorded in the grade book to determine whether the students obtained 70% accuracy on assignments at the end of the practicum. The measurement of the outcome was gleaned from a daily record of students' scores kept by the teacher during the practicum. Outcome 3 was considered successful if 32 of 45 students improved the writing of properly structured paragraphs with a score of 70%.

Outcome 4 stated that 32 of the 45 students will improve their grammar by obtaining 70% accuracy on grammar assignments. The writer collected data prior and during the implementation. The students' individual scores from grammar assignments of the pre- and posttest determined how many students obtained a grade of 70 by comparing the scores. The writer included a summary of the differences in students' scores between pre- and posttest (Appendix D). The writer averaged the scores recorded in the grade book from student's daily grammar assignments to determine whether the students obtained 70% accuracy on grammar assignments. The measurement of the outcome was

gleaned from a daily record of students' scores kept by the teacher during the practicum.

Outcome 4 was considered successful if 32 of 45 students improved their grammar scores to 70%.

## Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

### Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The topics examined for the literature review included: strategies for improving writing skills, collaborative grouping, computer word processing, journal writing, dialects and writing skills, computer distance learning, modeling writing for middle grades, and motivating writing skills.

In this writer's school setting, the problem addressed was that sixth-grade language arts students had difficulty writing essays. The inability of middle school students to properly write essays can be related to slow maturation of cognitive development.

A number of solutions were gleaned from the literature. Research indicated that a variety of metacognitive strategies could be used to improve writing skills. Combs (1997) stated that "middle schoolers must be required to use creative thinking to solve problems, to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize" (p. 4). Combs indicated examples of improving writing skills were to extend the students' understanding of the setting of a novel through the creation of detailed maps or travel guides which can be developed into essays, letters to the school or local newspaper, or parent/teen communication guides. The solution of extending students' understanding of a novel into metacognitive strategies worked with sixth-grade language arts classes to improve writing skills because students at this age needed prompts to induce their thinking and writing process. The writer incorporated these strategies for instruction of writing skills because middle school students need learning strategies of this nature to enhance their writing skills.

Morse (1986) indicated that using newspapers in upper elementary and middle

grades language arts class to develop grammar and writing skills improved students' writing abilities. Morse developed a guide for teachers who felt the need to supplement the students' learning beyond the textbook and included lessons for teachers to utilize across the curriculum. Utilizing the newspaper for teaching writing skills worked with sixth-grade language arts students because students were interested in the community's current events. The present writer incorporated using newspapers as a supplemental strategy for improving writing skills with the help of the local newspaper.

The American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation (1990) created a booklet that provided teachers with a variety of directed thinking writing activities with the utilization of models from the newspaper to improve students' writing and grammar skills. Directed thinking writing activities worked with sixth-grade language arts students because students' interests were related directly to news and feature stories in the newspaper. The present writer incorporated these activities for instruction of grammar and writing skills because the use of models of writing from the newspaper served as a learning tool for the students to observe and analyze when writing assignments.

Weber and Ingvarsson (1996) supported the American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation (1990). Their study indicated that the use of modeling for middle school students across the curriculum improved students' writing skills. They stated that newspapers were used as a communication device for the business and private community, and the use of newspapers in the classroom instilled good writing and communication skills. The use of modeling across the curriculum worked because students needed examples to follow and analyze for assignments of the writing process. The present writer

did not incorporate this strategy because she did not have the power base to implement across the curriculum.

Angeli's (1998) study supported Weber and Ingvarsson (1996). Angeli's study indicated that the development of a learner-centered instructional model for the teaching of reading and writing skills improved students' writing abilities and met the learners' individual needs. The instructional model was created from the 14 American Psychological Association principles which were used as the framework for the model. The approach worked with middle school students because they needed individualized instruction to improve writing skills. The present writer incorporated the concept of individualized learner-center principles in the classroom because the individualized needs of the students were met.

Another strategy to improve students' writing skills was a technique called deconstruction for reconstruction developed by Mufarej and Abrahamsohn (1997). Mufarej and Abrahamsohn created a technique of deconstruction for reconstruction to improve intermediate and upper-intermediate students who have difficulty writing organized, coherent, and fully developed sentences. The deconstruction method had students break down faulty sentences or paragraphs into a group of kernel sentences, and then students reorganized and combined them to form proper sentences. The implementation of the strategy worked in language arts classes to improve writing skills because students needed to have drilled practice of polishing their own writing assignments so that they observed their mistakes and learned how to improve them. The present writer incorporated this strategy for instruction of writing skills because the

students found this technique useful in all written assignments of their academic schedule.

It was indicated by Roe (1997) that middle school teachers enabled and engaged students of all academic abilities to stimulate a higher order of thinking skills so that reading and writing skills improved. She recognized that the classroom environment needed to entice students to want to write. Roe found that teachers created activities to stir the interest of the students to engage in the writing process. Once the attention of the student was engaged, the teacher introduced the students to examples of good writing models. This generated students to a higher level of thinking to construct proper writing. Engaging students of all abilities worked because students were heterogeneously grouped in all language arts classes. The present writer incorporated these thinking skills for instruction of writing skills because the students were able to help each other in these directed writing activities.

Research indicated that a second solution of cooperative learning in small groups improved middle school students' writing skills (Cason, Tabscou, & Thomas, 1991; Houston, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Jordan, 1990; Kerr, 1998; Klemm, 1997; Rosberg & Streff, 1989; Sparks, 1982; Toth, 1997; Wood & Jones, 1996). Cooperative learning worked with sixth-grade language arts classes to improve writing skills because middle school students would rather work in groups because they felt less threatened by this type of learning. The present writer incorporated cooperative learning as part of the instructional methods for teaching writing skills because students liked the security of knowing they were not asked to write on their own.

Sparks (1982) developed a strategy called power writing combined with

cooperative learning for improving writing skills of elementary and middle school students. Power writing was used with students of all age groups. Power writing taught students in cooperative grouping the writing process with steps. Students labeled parts of the composition, and students became the structure of the composition. Power writing combined with cooperative learning worked because it enabled the students to become active learners with their bodies as they constructed the essay assignments. The present writer incorporated power writing with cooperative learning because students grasped the structure of an essay much quicker than just using pen and paper for developing the essays.

Another solution for improving students' writing skills was the use of paired grouping, as described in Rosberg and Streff's (1989) project. They conducted a project where college students were paired with middle school students in a special education class to improve writing skills of the middle school students. As a result, middle school students learned writing skills, but they also experienced seeing adults write and value the writing process. The paired cooperative learning worked because the middle school students had individualized instruction so that the students' needs were met. The present writer did not have the power base to do this in her setting.

Jordan (1990) created an activity where students were divided into teams to label parts of the sentence, rewrite poorly written sentences, and rewrite paragraphs to improve students' writing abilities. The students worked in teams, exchanged written assignments, labeled parts of a sentence, pointed out poorly written sentences, and rewrote those sentences. The students punctuated sentences using semicolons and



colons. Jordan's activities worked because the students were given time to rewrite assignments in groups. This activity promoted higher level thinking skills and creative thoughts. The present writer incorporated this activity because it gave students another method of practicing the writing process in the classroom without feeling threatened by the assignment.

Another solution found in the literature to improve students' writing skills was collaborative learning in Houston's (1990) practicum. Houston used collaborative learning in her English classroom which actively involved college students into learning useful applications of writing skills for use in future careers. Houston divided the students into small groups and developed activities on job related writing, subject-verb agreement, technical definitions, and resume writing. Collaborative learning worked because students had no fear of working together in small groups to complete writing assignments. The present writer incorporated collaborative learning because students improved writing skills and social communication skills.

Johnson (1990) conducted a practicum on heterogeneously grouped high school seniors utilizing cooperative problem-solving and process writing to improve writing skills. Results revealed the success of the practicum. All of the participants improved their writing abilities. Cooperative problem-solving and process writing methods worked because students needed both skills when using the literature and grammar books for writing assignments. The present writer used the cooperative process writing method because it allowed students to grasp essay writing in a step-by-step process.

Wood and Jones (1996) supported Houston (1990) implementation of

collaborative learning. Wood and Jones stated that collaborative learning was a great tool for teaching middle school students writing skills, but to make sure each student was held accountable to the work assignment by having students evaluate each other's interactions of the group. Collaborative learning combined with students' evaluations worked because students enjoyed working in groups to complete writing assignments. The present writer incorporated collaborative learning with students' evaluations because students focused more on assignments knowing they were evaluating each others' contributions in the group.

Another solution for improving students' writing skills was found in the literature review called FORUM. Klemm (1997) has implemented a collaborative software called FORUM in which students created their writing projects together without feeling shy and slow in group activities. There were many benefits to teachers and students from using FORUM. Writing skills were developed. Teachers gave feedback to every student. Shy students were heard. Aggressive students could not dominate group action. Collaborative software would not work because computers in this school were outdated, and the school was not set up for distance learning. The writer did not incorporate this collaborative software because this school was technologically challenged and had no funds to buy this software.

Cason et al. (1991) conducted a study using cooperative learning on 7<sup>th</sup>- through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade African American males who scored below the grade level means to improve writing skills. The 3-year study findings suggest that the teachers' improved rapport with students, and improved students' writing skills. Cooperative learning worked because

the African American male students' needs were met. The present writer incorporated cooperative learning for all students to learn the writing process of essays.

Another type of grouping was found in the literature to improve students' writing skills. Toth (1997) used cross-age peer grouping with 1<sup>st</sup>- and 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students to improve writing skills of both age groups. After the 6-week study had been completed, the average gain in holistic scoring results proved to be very significant. The first graders asked questions of the writing process, and the sixth graders needed to increase their knowledge of the writing process to answer them. Cross-age peer grouping worked because students learned from each other while completing the writing process. The present writer did not incorporate this method of cross-age peer grouping because it was out of the writer's power base.

Kerr (1998) assessed the value of collaborative learning of a small group of students, and she indicated that students constructed a richer writing product and were given a chance to engage in dialog about their writing. Collaborative learning worked because students were given a chance to engage in discussions with their peers about the subjects in which they were writing. The present writer incorporated collaborative learning.

A third strategy for improving students' writing abilities was the use of word processing. This strategy was described in the literature (Bangert-Drowns, 1989; Bender, 1988; Bonk & Reynolds, 1990; Breland & Lytle, 1990; Freitas & Ramos, 1998; Liechty, 1989; Morocco & Newman, 1985; Pomper, 1986). In the writer's setting, word processing worked because the classroom contained computers to be utilized by the

students to improve their writing skills. The present writer incorporated word processing as one of the teaching strategies to improve students' writing abilities.

Morocco and Neuman (1985) conducted a study by using word processing on 14 fourth-grade children who had learning disabilities to improve writing skills. Teachers used three different approaches of teaching writing skills with the computer: guided writing, skill building, and strategic. Guided writing was the same as directed thinking writing activities where the teacher modeled writing for the students. Skill building was where the teachers taught metacognitive skills for students to reach a higher level of thinking when it came to punctuation, spelling, and grammar skills. Strategic approach provided students with strategies for managing the writing process. Results of the study found that the strategic approach was the highest level of independent work and student involvement with utilizing the computer. Word processing worked because the classroom contained computers that were networked with a word processing program. The present writer incorporated word processing into the instructional strategies to help improve students' writing abilities.

Pomper (1986) supported Morocco and Neuman (1985) implementing word processing as an educational tool for improving writing skills. Pomper conducted a study using word processing on developmental college students who had difficulty writing essays. Word processors benefitted the students by storing and retrieving students' writing, moving large blocks of writing very quickly, spell checking students' work, encouraging speed reading, and testing and evaluating. Pomper found that the computer was an excellent tool for improving students' writing abilities. This type of word

processing did not work because the writer's school did not have the financial funds to set-up a system like Pomper had to her access. The present writer did not incorporate this strategy because she did not have the power base to implement this plan.

Bender (1988) supported Pomper (1986) use of word processors. Bender conducted a study using word processing in the computer assisted facility located in the library of Stetson Middle School on minority "at risk" students to improve writing skills. Results of the study indicated that the students' attitudes and writing skills improved immensely. Word processing worked because the students had access to computers and a word processing program. The present writer did not incorporate this type of word processing in a computer assisted facility because she did not have the power base to create a facility like Stetson Middle School.

After conducting a study on studies that used experimental and control groups to compare conventional writing instruction with instruction using the word processing, Bangert-Drowns (1989) found that word processing improved the students' attitudes and writing abilities. Word processing worked because students enjoyed having control over what they wrote on the computer. The present writer incorporated word processing as part of the instruction for improving the students' writing ability.

Additionally, Liechty (1989) conducted a study on the computer's benefits in the composition classroom. Liechty reviewed many research studies on the use of word processing in the composition classroom, and found that instruction in writing with the word processor improved students' writing skills in a elementary or junior high school. Word processing worked because students were given time to write their essays on the

computers. The present writer engaged and enabled students to use word processing.

Another solution for improving writing skills was called generative and evaluative computerized prompting (Bonk & Reynolds, 1990). Bonk and Reynolds conducted a study using a generative and evaluative computerized prompting framework to improve writing skills of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and found that prompts improved the students from making changes in their writing assignments. The computerized prompts will work if the writer had the software and up-to-date computers to utilize during instruction. The present writer did not incorporate this prompting by computers while the students were writing because she did not have the power base.

Another software program found in the literature review called WordMap (Breland & Lytle, 1990) improved writing skills of students. Breland and Lytle used a software program called WordMAP to evaluate 92 college freshmen's written products as they used the word processor. The teachers were able to give students immediate feedback on their written assignments which allowed students to make corrections and rewrite essays in less time. Results indicated that WordMAP improved students' writing skills. The software program, WordMAP, would work if the present writer had the financial means to purchase the program. The present writer did not incorporate WordMAP because she writer did not have the power base to implement this program in the middle school.

A combination of word processing, video-conferencing, and World Wide Web writing activities were used in Freitas and Ramos's (1998) study to improve elementary and secondary school students' writing skills. This study was conducted for 2 years on elementary and secondary students. Results indicated video conferencing promoted social

interaction and communication with different people. World Wide Web provided students an information highway to explore and to develop written comprehension. Word processing encouraged interdisciplinary writing activities for students and improved writing skills. The combined strategies of word processing, video-conferencing, and World Wide Web would not work because the present writer does not have the hardware capabilities to implement in the classroom. The present writer did not incorporate these strategies because she did not have the power base.

The fourth solution for improving students' writing skills found in the literature was the use of portfolios (Bishop, 1996; Chapman, 1990; Colantone, Cunningham-Wetmore, & Dreznes, 1998; Fipp, Barry, Hargrave, & Countryman, 1996; Grabill, 1998; Hebert, 1996; Ladd & Hatton, 1997; Lewis, 1997; Miller, 1997). In the present writer's setting, portfolios worked because portfolios guided the students as to the goals in writing they wanted to achieve throughout the year. The present writer incorporated portfolios as part of the writing instruction because the students kept their writing assignments and goals in these throughout the entire year.

Chapman (1990) stated that their schools implemented the Illinois Writing Program combined with an authentic writing assessment, portfolio, to improve their students' writing. Teachers were trained to use the portfolio as an educational tool for instruction of writing skills. Students compiled a chosen collection of writing throughout the school year to be entered in the portfolio. The students' collection of writing reflected a varying degree of writing skills from the beginning to the end of the school year. Students were assessed on a holistic score on integration of how well organized and

written the compositions were. Results from the implementation of the Illinois Writing Program indicated that students' writing skills progressed on a higher level of writing. The writing program combined with portfolios will work because teachers could be trained how to implement the program so that students' writing would improve. The present writer did not incorporate this program due to the power base of the writer.

Fipp, Barry, Hargrave, and Countryman (1996) supported Chapman (1990). Fipp et al.'s case study found that portfolios were a great source of anecdotal information to improve the writing skills of heterogeneously grouped students. Portfolios demanded that each student assess his or her writing skills. Students realized their writing progress throughout the school year, and their progress was determined by how they took responsibility for their writing assignments. Portfolios worked because the writer stated this tool demonstrated the students' writing progress throughout the practicum. The present writer incorporated the use of portfolios because they served as a learning tool for the students and an evaluative instrument.

Hebert (1996) supported Fipp (1996) and Chapman (1990). It was indicated by Hebert that portfolios provided students with a birds eye view of their own progress and allowed them the fundamental knowledge of evaluating their own writing skills. Portfolios worked because the present writer taught the students the knowledge of how to evaluate their writing assignments. The present writer incorporated portfolios because they served as a guide or model for the students.

Bishop (1996) supported Hebert (1996). It was indicated by Bishop that the writing portfolio improved his eighth-grade language arts students' writing skills by



promoting their own self-identity. Middle school students need to develop a sense of who they are and opinions of different subjects. The writing portfolio worked because the students developed a sincere care for their writing assignments when they knew their writing was viewed by their peers and parents. The present writer incorporated the writing portfolio because she encouraged the students to use their portfolios as a tool for developing their writing skills.

Miller (1997) supported Bishop (1996). Miller began portfolio usage in his seventh-grade language arts class so that the students would be in control of their improvement of writing. Miller found that sharing the responsibility for portfolio assessment with students, their peers, and their parents made the students become independent learners of the writing process. Miller set guidelines for students, their peers, and their parents to assess the students' writing. Results of this sharing of the assessment, aided the teacher immensely. Portfolios worked among the students because the present writer trained the students how to utilize the portfolio for writing assignments. The present writer incorporated portfolio usage because she wanted the students to show their strength and independence as writers.

Lewis's (1997) guidebook described how a portfolio should be used for improving students' writing skills by Kentucky's parents. It gave parents information of what role to take in their child's development of writing skills, and it gave the stages of the writing process so that the parents could help their children in writing assignments. The guidebook gave a portfolio scoring scale, and how parents could improve their child's writing skills. This guidebook was used as a reference for information as to how to set

guidelines for students required writings for the portfolio. The present writer incorporated the guidelines found in this guidebook for students to improve their writing ability.

Ladd and Hatton (1997) supported Lewis (1997). Ladd and Hatton examined students' writing portfolios to determine whether the instructional guidelines for portfolios in the Kentucky Writing Program had improved from 1991-92 to 1994-95, and found that the students improved their writing ability significantly. The Kentucky Writing Program worked because this county's scores on writing improved. The present writer did not incorporate the Kentucky Writing Program because she did not have the power base to do so.

Additionally, Grabill (1998) stated that the use of portfolios in the eighth-grade language arts classroom made the students become aware of their improvement in writing from the beginning to the end of the year. A team of eighth-grade teachers of Fall Creek Valley Middle School needed to improve their students' writing because of a state mandated writing test which required students to demonstrate their writing skills. The team of teachers began students' writing in each subject area with set guidelines for their writing assignment. The students had to follow these guidelines and choose at the end of the year, two pieces of writing from each subject area to be placed permanently in their portfolios. As a result, students wrote paragraphs or full page responses to questions from each of the academic teachers. Students remarked that they could see an improvement in their own writing abilities. Portfolio usage worked because students wanted control of their learning process and used portfolios which stimulated this learning. The present writer incorporated portfolios because the students learned more about themselves as

they composed writings for their portfolios.

In addition, Colantone, Cunningham-Wetmore, and Dreznes (1998) conducted a study in which teachers implemented creative writing strategies and portfolio usage on elementary students to improve creative writing skills and found that students became more fluent writers, with an improvement of creative writing. The implementation of creative writing strategies and using portfolios worked because students needed writing prompts to improve their writing skills. The present writer incorporated writing strategies and used portfolios because students needed cues to encourage better writing skills.

The fifth solution found to improve students' writing skills was the use of journal writing (Calkin, 1987; Isaacs, & Brodine, 1994; Marsh, 1998; Robinson-Armstrong, 1991). Journal writing required students to write in their journals as an ice-breaker activity everyday in the language arts classroom. The present writer incorporated journal writing because the journal was used as a tool for free writing for the students.

Calkin (1987) indicated that journal writing can be used as an ice-breaking activity for beginning writers to improve their writing ability. Calkin felt that assigned exercises for writing in the journal bridged the gap between free writing and structured writing approach. As assignments progressed throughout the year, the students became more advanced in their writing skills. The teacher was very instrumental in the topics chosen for the writing assignments. As a result, journal writing improved the students' writing abilities. Journal writing served as a warming up exercise for writing skills for the students. The present writer incorporated journal writing because it improved students writing skills.

Robinson-Armstrong (1991) supported Calkin (1987). Robinson-Armstrong indicated that journal writing promoted independent thinking and improved writing skills. Journal writing constituted a teaching-learning tool in which students responded to questions on academic topics, wrote freely on personal responses, and kept a record of the yearly entries. Journal writing required students to write in their journals as part of the learning process of writing. The present writer incorporated journal writing because students needed to be aware of the importance of obtaining writing skills.

Isaacs and Brodine (1994) supported Robinson-Armstrong (1991). Isaacs and Brodine recommended that journal writing was very important for improving writing skills, and it should be done everyday in the classroom. They stated that all teachers wrote a mission statement of why the teacher and the students did journal writing, and posted this mission statement in the classroom. The mission statement served as a reminder for doing the journal writing everyday throughout the year. The present writer incorporated journal writing everyday because students needed to voice their opinions or feelings about topics that were important to them and progressed as independent thinkers.

Additionally, Marsh's (1998) study combined portfolios and journal writing to improve students' writing and found that the use of these strategies proved to be very significant for improving students' writing. As a result, the combined use of portfolios and journal writing worked for improving students' writing skills. The present writer incorporated both of these strategies to improve students' writing skills.

#### Description of Selected Solutions

The present writer utilized Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft, Writing Resource

Book, Transparency Pack, Sentence Composing Copy Masters, Thinking Skills Worksheets, Standardized Test Practice, Elaboration, Revision, and Proofreading Practice, Tests and Writing Assessment Prompts, and Guidelines for Writing Assessment and Portfolio Use; Blau's (1998) Grammar and Usage Workbook; Anderson, Brinnin, Leggett, & Probst's (1997) Elements of Literature, and Language and Writing Skills Worksheets; Evler's (1995) English Workshop; Ledbetter's (1998) Writing Portfolio Activities Kit; and Price's (1987) Basic Composition Activities Kit as instructional resources for improving writing skills of the two classes of 45 sixth grade language arts students.

Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft contained a variety of lessons on grammar usage and writing mechanics that were used to teach higher order thinking and metacognitive strategies related to the writing process. Blau's (1995) Writing Resource Book contained practice and reteaching exercises of writing on personal and expressive, observation and description, narrative and literary, informative, persuasion, and creating paragraphs and sentences which was used as supplementary writing assignments for the students.

Blau's (1995) Transparency Pack contained transparencies of the Blau's (1995) Thinking Skills, and Elaboration, Revision, and Proofreading modeled practice worksheets on writing skills. Blau's (1995) Sentence Composing Copy Masters contained activities for students that provided additional practice in composing sentences based on literary models.

Blau's (1995) Thinking Skills Worksheets contained 10 lessons that was used by the students to sharpen thinking skills and writing techniques. Blau's (1995) Standardized

Test Practice contained tests on capitalization and punctuation, and sentence completion in which the students took before and after instruction in the practicum.

Blau's (1995) Elaboration, Revision, and Proofreading Practice contained worksheets of writing topics such as personal and expressive, observation and description, narrative and literary, informative, and persuasion for students to construct proper paragraphs. Blau's (1995) Tests and Writing Assessment Prompts contained pretests and mastery tests for all grammar, usage, and mechanics concepts that the writer administered to the students.

Blau's (1995) Guidelines for Writing Assessment and Portfolio Use contained evaluation forms for the students' portfolio and evaluation forms to use as an anecdotal record for the teacher to use for grading. Blau's (1998) Grammar and Usage Workbook contained a variety of practice and reteaching exercises on grammar in which the writer assigned to the students.

Anderson, Brinnin, Leggett, and Probst's (1997) Elements of Literature contained a communications handbook and language handbook that was used as a supplementary resource for instruction of writing and grammar skills. Anderson, Brinnin, Leggett, and Probst's (1997) Language and Writing Skills Worksheets was used as grammar, mechanics, paragraph and composition practice for the students.

Evler's (1995) English Workshop contained writing, grammar, and mechanics exercises which the writer used as a supplementary resource for instruction. Ledbetter's (1998) Writing Portfolio Activities Kit provided exercises for integrating writing, grammar, and literature for the writer to assign to the students. Price's (1987)

Basic Composition Activities Kit included teacher directed and student directed activities on process writing skills which was utilized by the present writer as part of the instruction.

The writer utilized these resources because it was indicated in the research that writing skills of middle school students improved when students were engaged in higher order thinking and metacognitive strategies related to the writing process by modeling writing techniques, directed writing activities, cooperative learning, word processing on computers, portfolio development, and journal writing. By implementing these strategies and activities, the students achieved success in writing proper grammar, sentences, paragraphs, and essays.

The writer received parental permission to have their children participate in the practicum. The present writer was the teacher, and the facilitator over the implementation.

#### Report of Action Taken

The writer discussed all phases of the practicum implementation process with the school principal, after which the principal gave the writer verbal permission to proceed. The writer sent parent permission forms home to the students' parents prior to the implementation. All parents returned the permission forms by their children before the implementation began.

An action plan for the 8-month practicum was designed to help the writer and the students achieve the goal of improving writing skills. The writer was the facilitator and the teacher of the practicum, and she used leadership skills to carry out this practicum.

During the 1st week of Month 1 of the implementation process, the present writer administered an essay pretest (Appendix B) to evaluate students' level of writing, and

explained journal writing using Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students created a cover for their journals. Then the students were administered a grammar pretest from the Blau's (1995) Standardized Test Practice (Appendix D). An explanation from the writer to the students of how to use portfolios and the importance of portfolios was discussed, utilizing Ledbetter's (1998) Writing Portfolio Activities Kit and Blau's (1995) Guidelines for Writing Assessment and Portfolio Use. Students began and continued writing in journals 10 minutes everyday for the 8-month practicum. The writer recorded the pretest scores of the essay and grammar test in her grade book.

During the 2nd week of Month 1, the writer taught from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft mini-lesson 34, and directed writing activities so that students recognized sentences, identified the subject and the predicate of a sentence, identified complete sentences, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences. Then students had teacher directed activities from Anderson et al.'s (1997) Language and Writing Skills Worksheets in Chapter 8 Sentences-worksheets 1 - Sentence or Sentence Fragment, 2 - Finding the Subject, 3 - The Complete Subject and the Simple Subject, and 4 - Complete Predicate and the Simple Predicate.

During the 3rd week in Month 1, the writer modeled a proper sentence to the students. The students wrote proper sentences and labeled the complete subject and predicate. With cooperative learning, the writer paired students and exchanged papers to evaluate their partner's labeled sentences. The students were assigned exercises from Anderson et al.'s (1997) Language and Writing Skills Worksheets in Chapter 10- Kinds of Sentences worksheets 1 - Simple and Compound Sentences, 2 - Complex



Sentences, and 3 - Sentences Classified by Purpose. The present writer had students complete assignments from Anderson et al.'s (1997) Language and Writing Skills Worksheets in Chapter 11-Writing Effective Sentences worksheets 1 - Sentence Fragments, 2 - Run-on Sentences, 3 - Combining Sentences A, and 4 - Combining Sentences B.

During the 4th week in Month 1, the writer discussed and gave examples of sentences and sentence fragments to the students from Elver's (1995) English Workshop Chapter 9- lessons 'a' through 'f'. Utilizing Blau's (1995) Sentence Composing Copy Masters, the writer completed the following exercises. The students imitated professional writers' sentences using lesson 1. Students unscrambled sentences and wrote proper sentences in lesson 2. The writer modeled how to combine related ideas into sentences for students, and students did the activities combining sentences in lesson 3.

During the 1st week in Month 2, the writer explained and modeled how the subject of the sentence can be in different positions to the students. Using cooperative learning, students were divided into small groups, and then they wrote sentences. The students wrote the subject on a card and the rest of the sentence on another card. Students placed the card with the subject in different positions of the sentences, recognizing that subjects were in unusual positions in a sentence. Students used higher order thinking skills to complete an assignment on the subject in different positions from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. The writer explained and modeled the 4 kinds of sentences to the students from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students identified the 4 kinds of sentences, and used correct end punctuation for each kind of sentence in Blau's (1995)

### The Writer's Craft.

During the 2nd week in Month 2, the students classified sentences by purpose and placed correct end punctuation in Evler's (1995) English Workshop, Chapter 9 lessons 'p' through 's'. The writer used Blau's (1995) Sentence Composing Copy Masters in the following exercises. The writer modeled examples of how to write sentence openers. The students composed sentence openers by adding emphasis and rhythm to sentences with the use of single words or groups of words from assignments in lesson 4. The students created sentence closers by adding important details to sentences in classroom assignments in lesson 6.

During the 3rd week in Month 2, the writer used as a resource Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students completed an assessment over all the skills covered thus far on sentences. The writer recorded the scores from the sentence assessment in the grade book. From the grammar handbook 35, the writer taught students how to identify nouns, to distinguish between a common and a proper noun, to distinguish between a singular and a plural noun, to form plural nouns correctly, to identify nouns that show possession, and to form possessive nouns correctly. The students identified nouns in an exercise in the grammar book by telling whether the noun is a person, place, thing, or idea. The students distinguished between common and proper nouns in a classroom assignment by defining a common noun or proper noun in the exercise.

From utilizing Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft, the writer explained and modeled how to form plural nouns and implemented the following teaching strategies. Students worked in small groups to create a list of 10 to 20 singular nouns. This list represented the

7 rules of forming plurals. Students exchanged lists and challenged the recipients to write the singular nouns in plural form. Students completed exercises on singular and plural nouns, and as a whole class we checked the exercises orally.

During the 4th week in Month 2, the writer utilized Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft in the following activities. The writer explained and modeled a possessive noun to students. The students formed possessive nouns correctly by demonstrating an understanding from completing exercises in class. Students completed the additional practice over all the skills relating to nouns. Students completed the Noun Review as an assessment, and the writer recorded the scores in her grade book.

During the 1st week in Month 3, the writer used Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft in the following activities. The writer taught students using strategies such as directed thinking activities how to identify action verbs and linking verbs in grammar handbook 36. Students identified action and linking verbs in written exercises. The writer taught students to distinguish between main verbs and helping verbs by modeling examples of both. The students distinguished between main verbs and helping verbs by correctly completing exercises.

Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft was used by the writer in the following activities. The teacher modeled to students how to recognize a direct object in a sentence. Students used higher order thinking to recognize a direct object by orally identifying the verb in the sentence and identifying the direct object which answers "what" to that verb. The writer taught students to identify linking verbs and predicate words by modeling examples in the classroom. Students identified linking verbs and predicate words by writing the linking

verbs on paper. Then the students exchanged with other students to check their work that was completed from the classroom assignment.

During the 2nd week in Month 3, Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft was used by the writer for classroom instruction. Students completed a mixed review over linking verbs and direct objects for an assessment score. The writer recorded these scores in the grade book, and taught students by modeling how to recognize verb tenses and how to form present, past, and future tenses of verbs. Students recognized and formed verb tenses accurately in exercises. The writer taught students by modeling how to identify the 3 principal parts of a regular verb. Students chose the correct verb form given in sentences in an oral classroom assignment.

The writer utilized Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft in the following exercises. The writer explained to the students, models of the 3 principal parts of irregular verbs. Students worked independently in correctly writing the irregular verb forms in exercises. Students took an assessment over using correct regular and irregular forms. The writer graded the assessment and recorded the scores in the grade book. The writer taught students to choose the correct forms of often-confused verbs by using examples. Students completed the assigned exercises independently on often-confused verbs, and the class went over these exercises orally to check their work. Students took a test on verbs including all objectives learned thus far in the practicum from Blau's (1995) Tests and Writing Assessment Prompts. The writer graded the test and recorded the scores in the grade book.

During the 3rd week in Month 3, the writer taught from Blau's (1995) The

Writer's Craft. The writer taught subject-verb agreement from examples in the handbook. Students went over the subject-verb agreement exercises orally, and they identified the subject and the verb of the sentence before they chose the correct verb in exercises. The writer discussed the special forms of verbs and explained how these verbs agreed in number with the subject to the students. Students went over the special verb agreement exercises orally, and they chose the correct verb form. Students took a mixed review over all objectives covered thus far on subject-verb agreement. The writer graded the reviews and recorded the scores in the grade book.

Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft was used as a resource in the following activities. The writer taught the students to use verbs that agree in number with compound subjects by demonstrating examples. The writer taught the students to use verbs that agreed when a prepositional phrase separates the subject and the verb of the sentence by using examples. Students orally identified the prepositional phrase, the subject, and the verb in the sentence in exercises. The writer read and discussed verb agreement with indefinite pronouns to students. Students used metacognitive thinking skills to complete the exercises where the students changed the verb to present tense. The writer administered a test to the students over subject-verb agreement from Blau's (1995) Tests and Writing Assessment Prompts.

During the 4th week in Month 3, the writer taught from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. The writer explained and identified pronouns and their antecedents in sentences for students to learn. Students learned the personal pronouns, and they recited them orally in class for a grade. Students completed the exercises on identifying pronouns

and its antecedent. The writer introduced the subject pronouns to the students, and the students chose the correct pronoun that went into the sentence in exercises. Students completed an assignment on subject pronouns in Blau's (1998) Grammar and Usage Workbook for a grade. The writer graded the assignment and recorded the score in the grade book.

The writer introduced object pronouns to the students and gave them models of where the object pronouns can be placed in a sentence with Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students memorized the object pronouns and recited them for a grade. Students chose the correct object pronouns, and as a class, the students checked them orally with guidance from the teacher. The writer introduced the possessive pronouns to the students, and the students memorized the list of pronouns and recited them to the class for a grade. Students used pronouns that showed possession in the exercises, and they were introduced to indefinite pronouns. Students memorized the list of indefinite pronouns. Students demonstrated an understanding of pronouns by writing the possessive pronoun that agreed in number with each indefinite pronoun in exercises. The class went over these exercises orally to make sure students had an understanding of pronouns before they were assessed. Students took a test over all pronoun skills from Blau's (1995) Test and Writing Assessment Prompts.

During the 1st week in Month 4, the writer taught students how to identify and use adjectives by having them describe pictures of various objects. The writer had the students write sentences with adjectives describing those pictures. They read insert sentences orally and described the senses that this adjective pertained. The students completed the

exercises on identifying adjectives in sentences in handbook 38- Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft.

Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft was used for instruction by the writer in the following activities. The writer described the difference of a common and a proper adjective to the students using models. The students demonstrated their understanding of adjectives by identifying vague adjectives and replacing them with a more descriptive adjective in sentences. The writer taught the students the 3 functions of adjectives by using models. Students identified adjectives and told whether they answer to the questions what kind, how many, or which one in exercises. The writer explained what article and demonstrative adjectives functions were by using examples. Students identified article and demonstrative adjectives in exercises.

During the 2nd week in Month 4, the writer explained predicate adjectives to the students by using models from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft, and students identified predicate adjectives in sentences. Students took a test over all adjective objectives from Blau's (1995) Test and Writing Assessment Prompts. The writer graded the tests and recorded the scores in the grade book. The writer explained comparative and superlative form of adjectives by using models from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft, and students used comparative and superlative forms of adjectives correctly in exercises.

The writer taught from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft in the following activities. The writer introduced adverbs by using examples, and students identified adverbs and explained whether it answers to how, when, where, or to what extent, and wrote the word it modified in completing exercises. The students distinguished between adverbs and

adjectives by choosing the correct modifier in exercises, and the writer discussed double negatives to the students by using models. Students took a test over understanding adverbs from Blau's (1995) Test and Writing Assessment Prompts. The writer graded the tests and recorded the score in the grade book.

During the 3rd week in Month 4, the writer taught from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. The writer explained how to recognize proper nouns and adjectives and capitalized them using models, and the students identified proper nouns and adjectives, and capitalized them in exercises. Students improved their proofreading skills by identifying words that should be capitalized in assignments. Skills that students practiced were capitalizing names of particular places or things, names of months, days, holidays, and historical events, names of races, religions, nationalities, languages, clubs, organizations, business firms, and words referring to God and religious scriptures. Students identified which words needed capitalizing and stated the rule of capitalization as it applied to the answer in exercises.

During the 4th week in Month 4, the writer discussed the model of an outline to the students to demonstrate which words needed capitalizing from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft, and the students identified which words in sentences and outlines should be capitalized in the exercises. The students took a test over all rules of capitalization from the Blau's (1995) Tests and Writing Assessment Prompts. The writer graded the test and recorded the scores in the grade book.

During the 1st week in Month 5, the writer taught from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. The writer explained the purpose of prepositions by using examples.



Students recognized prepositions and their objects in assignments, and they were required to learn the list of prepositions and recited them to the writer for a grade. Students identified prepositional phrases after the writer explained how to recognize them. The writer explained to the students how to use the object forms of pronouns as simple or compound objects of prepositions by using examples. Students wrote the correct form of pronoun after prepositions in the assignments.

During the 2nd week in Month 5, the writer used models to teach the students the difference between prepositions and adverbs from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students identified and labeled adverbs and prepositions on assignments. Students took a checkpoint on prepositions. The writer graded the checkpoints and recorded the scores in the grade book.

The writer explained the function of conjunctions to the students by using the examples in Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. The students practiced joining words or groups of words by writing sentences with conjunctions in exercises, and they reviewed all grammar by completing exercises. Students took a post test on grammar from Blau's (1995) Standardized Test Practice. The writer graded the post test and recorded the scores in the grade book.

During the 3rd week in Month 5, the writer taught from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. The writer explained to the students all forms of punctuation-the period, question mark, exclamation mark, comma, apostrophe, hyphen, colon, semi-colon, and quotation marks from examples. Students applied periods correctly in sentences, initials, abbreviations, outlines, and lists in exercises. Students punctuated a conversation with the

needed punctuation marks of periods, question marks, and exclamation points. Students wrote sentences adding commas to separate ideas in exercises. Students placed commas in a sentence to make writing concise in exercises.

The writer taught the students to use commas to set off introductory words or phrases, the names of people spoken to, and most appositives by using models. Students wrote a paragraph placing commas where they were needed in an assignment. The writer discussed and demonstrated where commas should set off direct quotations, after the greeting, and closing of a friendly letter using examples. Students wrote dialogs with a partner and placed commas where they should be. Students composed friendly letters and placed commas where they were needed and put these in their portfolios.

During the 4th week in Month 5, the writer taught from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students took a checkpoint over all the rules of a comma. The writer graded the checkpoint and recorded the scores in the grade book, and she demonstrated to students how to show possession and to form contractions with apostrophes. Students were demonstrated how to use hyphens to divide words at the end of lines and to write compound numbers and fractions by using models. Students applied the rules of the apostrophe and the hyphen by punctuating sentences in the proper place in exercises.

The writer explained the use of a colon and the semicolon by using models. Students composed business letters by demonstrating the proper usage of the colon from Price's (1987) Basic Composition Activities Kit. Students demonstrated the proper usage of the semicolon by combining sentences correctly. The writer explained the use of quotation marks at the beginning and at the end of a direct quotation by using the

examples in Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students were divided into small groups, and they wrote a short play using quotation marks where needed. Students read their play to the class and denoted where the quotation marks were placed in the text of the play.

The writer discussed how to punctuate titles using quotation marks or underlining by using the examples in Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft, and students placed quotation marks or underlined titles to an exercise. Students went over orally the punctuation review for practice before taking a test. Students took a test over all punctuation from Blau's (1995) Test and Writing Assessment Prompts. The writer graded the test and recorded the score in the grade book.

During the 1st week in Month 6, the writer explained how to write a paragraph by modeling the writing process for creating a paragraph. Students developed their own paragraph as the writer modeled the structure, content, and organization of a paragraph. The writer labeled the elements of a paragraph, and the students followed this writing strategy in their paragraph. The writer explained the importance of having a topic sentence, supporting details, and a closing sentence in a paragraph. Students completed exercises on developing topic sentences from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft.

During the 2nd week of Month 6, students read paragraphs, and then wrote an interesting topic sentence for each paragraph on exercises from Blau's (1995) Writing Resource Book. Students discussed their topic sentences with their classmates. Students developed a paragraph using prompts and cues. The writer explained the process of revising a paragraph, and the students revised a paragraph. Students placed in their portfolios all the paragraphs they wrote. The writer taught the students transitional device

words for writing a smooth coherent paragraph.

During the 3rd week of Month 6, the writer discussed style in writing which brought writing to life, and students read excellent examples of paragraphs with style from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft. Students wrote a paragraph using examples of all 5 senses, and they underlined the examples of the 5 senses in the paragraph. Students further developed ideas in a paragraph using descriptive details on a writing assignment from Blau's (1995) Elaboration, Revision, and Proofreading Practice. The writer wrote a model of a persuasive paragraph to the students. The students wrote a persuasive paragraph to enter into their portfolios. The students read orally all written work chosen for the portfolio to the classroom.

During the 4th week of Month 6, the writer wrote a model of a narrative paragraph for the students describing all the elements required in a narrative paragraph. Students wrote a narrative paragraph, and they read it to the class. Students began using a word processor called the Word Perfect program to write their paragraphs on the computer. The writer wrote a model of a comparison paragraph for students to model their writing. Students read their comparison paragraph to the class, and students pointed out the elements of a paragraph when asked by the writer.

During the 1st week of Month 7, the writer explained the composition to the students by writing a model for the students to refer to when they were writing a composition. The students' compositions consisted of 5 paragraphs- the introductory paragraph, the body of the composition which consisted of 3 paragraphs, and the conclusion paragraph. Students wrote a narrative composition using the model the writer

wrote for them. Students wrote their compositions one paragraph each day, so in one week one composition was written. The writer checked the students' writing everyday to make sure the writing was on track.

During the 2nd week of Month 7, the writer wrote a model of a "how to" composition for the students to write down for an example to use when they wrote a "how to" composition. Students did an assignment on chronological order in Blau's (1995) Thinking Skills Worksheets. Students wrote a "how to" composition on something they were familiar with doing, making sure it was in time order sequence. The writer divided the class into 5 small groups, and each group was assigned one paragraph of the essay. The group assigned the introductory paragraph wrote it first, and the rest of the groups developed their paragraphs in the order of the composition was planned. When all groups finished, one student was assigned to use the Word Perfect program on the computer to type the composition. The writer demonstrated examples of first drafts of compositions and the polished model of the compositions from Blau's (1995) Transparency Pack.

During the 3rd week of Month 7, students observed a professional narrative writing of a short story from Anderson, Brinnin, Leggett, and Probst's (1997) Elements of Literature. Students wrote a narrative composition about an adventure that happened to them in real life. Students read this composition to the class, after they revised their compositions on the computer.

During the 4th week of Month 7, the writer wrote a model of a persuasive composition for the students to have an example to refer to when they wrote their persuasive composition. Students wrote a persuasive composition, revised it, and typed it

on the Word Perfect computer program. Students read their composition to the class, and the students pointed out the elements of the composition. Students placed each of their essays in their portfolios.

During the 1st week of Month 8, the writer wrote a model of a comparison composition for the students to use for an example for writing. The writer explained to the students the elements a comparison composition. The students wrote a comparison composition, revised it, typed it on the Word Perfect computer program. Then read it to the class.

During the 2nd week of Month 8, the writer wrote a model of a contrasting composition for the students to use for an example for writing. The writer explained to the students the elements of a contrasting composition. The students wrote a contrasting composition, revised it, typed it on the Word Perfect computer program. Then read it to the class.

During the 3rd week of Month 8, the writer wrote a model of a descriptive composition for the students to use for an example for writing. The writer explained the elements of a descriptive composition. The student wrote a descriptive composition, revised it, typed it on the Word Perfect computer program, and read it to the class.

During the 4th week of Month 8, the writer reviewed the elements of writing a composition for the students. The students fine tuned their writing skills, if they had questions the writer helped solve them. Students chose the title of their writings that they wanted to keep in their portfolio for their parents to view and made a table of contents for their portfolio. Students took a posttest on writing (Appendix B) a narrative composition.

## Chapter V: Results

### Results

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that sixth-grade language arts students have difficulty writing essays successfully. The goal was to develop a program with a concentrated focus on writing skills strategies.

Three strategies were used to improve students' writing skills. The first strategy was to teach higher order thinking and metacognitive strategies related to the writing process by modeling writing techniques and directed writing activities. The second strategy the teacher used was cooperative learning in small groups while working on writing assignments. The third strategy for the teacher was to teach word processing and writing skills by using computers. The goal was for the sixth-grade language arts students to write essays successfully. The expectation was that students would use these skills to advance from stage four of a curriculum-based writing assessment an average level to writing an essay on a higher level of engaging or extending level. Forty-five sixth-grade students participated in this practicum process.

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum.

1. At least 32 of 45 students will improve essay writing by obtaining 70% accuracy on essay tests after eight months of instruction. The instrument of evaluation was a teacher made essay pretest and posttest which was scored by a rubric and assigned a 1 to a 4 score which was converted to a numerical grade. The standard of performance was that 32 of 45 students will score 70 or above on the essay posttest.

The outcome was not met.

Thirty of the 45 students improved essay writing skills by obtaining 70% accuracy on assignments. Scores from the pretest indicated that none of the students obtained 70 or above on the essay writing test. The results of the scores are presented in chart form (Appendix C).

2. At least 32 of 45 students will improve sentence structure by obtaining 70% accuracy on assignments. The instrument of evaluation was sentence structure assignments from exercises in Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft textbook. The data was stored in a cumulative record submitted by the teacher which contained student's grades on assignments. The teacher set the standard of performance at 70% for all assignments.

The outcome was not met.

Thirty of the 45 students improved sentence structure writing skills by obtaining 70% accuracy on assignments. The writer averaged students' scores and recorded this data in the grade book.

3. At least 32 of 45 students will improve developing paragraphs by obtaining 70% accuracy on paragraph development assignments. The instrument of evaluation was paragraph writing assignments from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft textbook. The teacher set the standard of performance at 70% for all assignments.

The outcome was not met.

Thirty of the 45 students improved paragraph development by obtaining 70% accuracy on assignments. The writer averaged students' scores and recorded this data in the grade book.

4. At least 32 of 45 students will improve their grammar by obtaining 70%



accuracy on an final grammar test after 8 months of instruction. The instrument of evaluation was a grammar pretest and posttest from Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft administered at the beginning and at the end of the practicum. The standard of performance was that 32 out of 45 students will score 70 on the grammar posttest.

The outcome was not met.

Scores from the grammar posttest indicated that 20 students obtained 70 or above.

### Discussion

The first outcome showed that 30 of the 45 students scored 70% on essay writing skills. This unsuccessful outcome was attributed to the students' poor writing skills. When the students completed their essay pretest, all students scored below 60%. Their essay writing ability was very limited. They did not understand the structure and organization of an essay. The teacher had to start from the basics of writing essays so that the students would have the writing experience to write an essay successfully.

As the result of the essay posttest, of the 45 students 15 scored 60%, 23 scored 70%, 5 scored 80%, and 2 scored 85%. An overall mean of students' writing skills was calculated from week 1 on the essay pretest, week 16 from a mid-year essay test, and week 32 from an essay posttest are shown in the Table. Both female and male students scored 60% on the essay pretest at the beginning of the practicum. At midpoint of the practicum, both female and male students were improving their writing skills by obtaining 65% on essay writing skills. In week 32 of the practicum, the female and male students fall short of attaining an average of 70% on the essay posttest. Of the 45 students, 15 scored 60%, 23 scored 70%, 5 scored 80%, and 2 scored 85%. A total of 30 students scored

Table

Mean Scores of Students' Essay Writing Skills

Students	Week 1	Week 16	Week 32
Females	60	65	68.33
Males	60	65	68.57

70% or above. The mean score for the female students was 68.333, and the mean score for the male students was 68.57.

The writer taught higher order thinking and metacognitive strategies to the students by modeling writing techniques and directed writing activities. Weber and Ingvarsson (1996) implemented modeling to improve their middle school students' writing skills. They also used newspapers to instill good writing and communication skills. The writer found that students learned more quickly when they had a model to use as an example for writing assignments in the classroom.

The writer attributed students' low scores due to the fact that they did not have a proper foundation in essay writing in their fifth-grade language arts class. The students were unknowledgeable about essay writing when they entered the sixth grade even though their writing scores from fifth grade indicated that they had an average skill of essay writing. The results indicated that the students did make improvements in their writing skills, but they did not improve enough to meet the projected goals of the writer.

The second outcome showed that 30 of 45 students improved sentence structure by obtaining 70% accuracy on assignments. Of the 45 students, 13 scored 60%, 2 scored 65%, 19 scored 70%, 7 scored 75%, and 4 scored 80%. The mean score for the females at the end of the 8-month practicum was 69.58%, and the male mean score at the end of the 8-month practicum was 67.3%.

The writer modeled the 4 basic types of sentence structure for the students. The writer implemented cooperative learning as an instructional method for teaching sentence structure (Cason, Tabscou, & Thomas, 1991; Houston, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Jordan, 1990; Kerr, 1998; Klemm, 1997; Rosberg & Streff, 1989; Sparks, 1982; Toth, 1997; Wood & Jones, 1996). Students learned how to combine the 4 types of sentences into compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences through cooperative learning. The writer observed students working more enthusiastically in groups than when they had to work by themselves.

The third outcome showed that 30 of 45 students improved paragraph development by obtaining 70% accuracy on assignments. Of the 45 students, 13 scored 60%, 2 scored 65%, 17 scored 70%, 9 scored 75%, and 4 scored 80%. The writer felt that students did improve writing paragraphs, but they did not meet the projected goal of the writer.

The students did improve their knowledge of the elements that should be included in a paragraph. The students could recite and define each element in the classroom, but they had difficulty in writing examples of those elements when they were assigned paragraph writing assignments.

The fourth outcome showed that 20 of 45 students improved grammar by obtaining 70% accuracy on a final grammar test after 8 months of instruction. Of that 20 students, there were 16 girls and 4 boys who scored 70% accuracy on the grammar posttest. The writer concluded that students did not meet the expected goal of 32 of 45 because of their educational background. Students discussed with the writer that they lacked grammar instruction and practice in earlier grades. The writer felt that students did improve in their grammar exercises, but they failed to meet the writer's projected goal.

Although students did not meet the projected goals, they improved their grammar skills in their sentence, paragraph, and essay writing assignments. The writer felt that the standardized grammar pre- and posttest might have been very difficult for the students. The test required the students to choose the incorrect grammar mistakes from a sentence which was marked by 4 letter choices. The students remarked after completing the test that it was difficult for them to determine the wrong grammar mistake in the sentence. The writer felt that Blau's (1995) The Writer's Craft tests were very challenging for the students.

### Recommendations

There is one recommendation that could benefit others in similar academic settings. The recommendation is as follows:

Start practicing writing skills with students at third grade level so that they would have a background of writing experience to expand.

There are a number of recommendations that could have increased the likelihood of success in the writer's 8-month practicum. They are as follows:

1. Provide students with a writing workbook so that they could work at home on writing assignments to have extra writing practice.
2. Provide students with educational seminars on the benefits of having excellent writing skills.
3. Provide students an opportunity to meet people with careers that are related to writing skills, and they will be able to learn the benefits of having writing skills in the real world of today.
4. Provide students an opportunity for apprenticeship in a business in the community that will allow them to implement their writing skills.
5. Provide students with a language arts course that includes writing, grammar, and spelling skills. A separate reading class should be developed into the curriculum instruction which would allow more practice for writing skills in the language arts class.

The rationale for these recommendations is that all students would have improved writing skills.

#### Dissemination

The writer plans to disseminate the practicum results in a meeting of the middle school language arts faculty. The writer will explain the strategies used in this practicum, and the teachers will receive information on the type of materials to use to improve students' writing skills.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INFORMAL SURVEY TO LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS**

## INFORMAL SURVEY TO LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS

Please answer the questions concerning the writing abilities of the students at middle school level.

1. Do you think the students at this middle school have a writing problem? Yes or No
2. If you answered yes, please list the reasons you think the students have writing problems.
3. Do you have any evidence of students who do have writing problems? If so, please list the evidence.

**APPENDIX B**  
**ESSAY PRETEST AND POSTTEST**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ESSAY PRETEST/POSTTEST

Write a narrative composition on one of the following topics.

- A. From one of the holidays we celebrate during the year, which one would be your favorite choice to celebrate and why?
- B. If you could become an zoo animal, which one would you choose and why?
- C. If you had one special wish that could be granted for you, what would you wish for and why?

APPENDIX C  
ESSAY PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS

## ESSAY PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS

<u>Boys</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>
B1	60	60	G1	60	80
B2	60	70	G2	60	70
B3	60	70	G3	60	75
B4	60	80	G4	60	70
B5	60	70	G5	60	60
B6	60	70	G6	60	70
B7	60	70	G7	60	70
B8	60	80	G8	60	60
B9	60	85	G9	60	70
B10	60	70	G10	60	70
B11	60	70	G11	60	60
B12	60	60	G12	60	70
B13	60	85	G13	60	60
B14	60	80	G14	60	60
B15	60	60	G15	60	70
B16	60	60	G16	60	70
B17	60	60	G17	60	70
B18	60	60	G18	60	70
B19	60	60	G19	60	70
B20	60	60	G20	60	70
B21	60	60	G21	60	80
			G22	60	60
			G23	60	70
			G24	60	70
Boys	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Girls	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean
	60	68.57		60	68.33

APPENDIX D  
GRAMMAR PRETEST AND POSTTEST

### Grammar Pretest and Posttest

**Directions.** One or more of the underlined sections in the following sentences may contain an error in grammar, punctuation, spelling, or capitalization. Write the letter of each incorrect section. Then rewrite the section correctly. If there is no error in an item, write D

*Example*      The first navigator to sail completely around the world  
A  
was Juan Sebastian del Cano in 1522. Magellan did not live. To complete  
B C  
the expedition. No error  
D  
*Answer*      C-live to

1. We will visit my grandpa in Mexico for the *posada* celebration before Christmas. He  
A B  
will make pinatas for all of us. No error  
C D
2. The butterflys name may have come from folklore there are stories about witches taking  
A B C  
the form of a butterfly to steal butter and milk. No error  
D
3. A drop of water is smaller than you might think. There is 120 drops in a teaspoon.  
A B C  
No error  
D
4. The parachute was invented to help people jump out of burning buildings safe. No error  
A B C D
5. First, the veterinarian showed Ian and I how to clip the cats claws. No error  
A B C D
6. Look at them two crystals. The largest one grew more slowly than the other. No error  
A B C D
7. Either of the witnesses will tell their story to the Judge. No error  
A B C D
8. The people of North Africa make food, medicine, cooking oil, bowls, baskets, sandals,  
A  
rope, and fuel. From parts of the date palm tree. No error  
B C D
9. Everyone should be careful about their diet. Setting down regularly to meals high in  
A B  
sugar and fat can lead to certain diseases. No error.  
C D



### Grammar Pretest and Posttest Continued

10. Only fourteen out of every one hundred wives in the United States are older than their husbands. No error  
A B C D
11. In ancient England, the fierce Celtic warrior Boadicea rided into London with her soldiers and burned the city to the ground. No error  
A B C D
12. At the Pentagon building in Arlington Virginia there are almost seventy thousand miles of telephone lines! No error  
A B C D
13. On Christmas Eve, the organ in Joseph Mohr's church broke down. Within three hours, him and the church organist had wrote "Silent Night" so the church members would have music. No error  
A B C D
14. Thousands searched for gold in the Klondike at the hieght of the gold rush. now, almost one hundred years later, people are still digging there. No error  
A B C D
15. Balloons were stuck to the ceiling they fell down later. No error  
A B C D



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